DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 326 070 FL 018 997

AUTHOR Hedayet, Nagwa
TITLE Some Errors in the Writings of the Intermediate and Advanced Learners of Arabic as a Foreign Language.
PUB DATE Apr 90
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the World Congress of Applied Linguistics, sponsored by the International Association of Applied Linguistics (9th, Thessaloniki, Greece, April 15-21, 1990).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Advanced Courses; *Arabic; Contrastive Linguistics; Difficulty Level; Discourse Analysis; English; *Error Patterns; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Interpretive Skills; Language Patterns; Second Language Learning; *Syntax; Translation; Uncommonly Taught Languages; *Written Language

ABSTRACT

A study investigated patterns in the apparent syntactic errors of native English-speaking, upper-level learners of Arabic as a foreign language. One hundred writing samples, including summaries, criticisms, and free composition, were gathered from a number of university courses. Error types analyzed included articles, subordinate clauses, two-word vocabulary, active participles, tense and agreement, and word order. It is concluded that by teaching an integral grammar course in composition to intermediate and advanced learners of Arabic, many problems of syntax can be overcome. Some kind of contrastive analysis of functional discourse patterns in Arabic and English should also be considered. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED326070

presented at the Meeting of the World Congress of Applied Linguistics, Thessaloniki, Greece, April 15-21, 1990

Some Errors in the Writings of the Intermediate & Advanced Learners of Arabic As a Foreign Language

by : Nagwa Hedayet
Arabic Language Institute
The American University in Cairo

There are some errors that are found in the written production of the intermediate and advanced students of Arabic as a foreign language (AFL). These errors appear to be simple syntactic errors at the first sight. After examining them thoroughly, these errors show syntactic difficulties that are so much related to the language use. Such errors may not be of great significance in spoken Arabic or in the written production of the beginners, i.e., at the communicative level of the language. The literary and the rhetorical standard, and the language use may significantly be affected at the intellectual level of the written language.

Though very simple as it may appear, the concept of definiteness and indefiniteness in Arabic constitutes a problem to the English speaking students of AFL at both the intermediate-high and the advanced levels. The active participle (ism al-Fāʿil), word - order, and the subordinate clauses cause other areas of syntactic difficulties. Two-word vocabulary & cultural idioms are other different areas of difficulties that are influenced by the learner's native language and can not be considered purely syntactic.

By analyzing these errors, one can categorize them, study the causes behind them and may get useful knowledge to apply in the teaching process of Arabic as a foreign language. This may lead to the developing of both rhetorical coherence of discourse and grammatical cohesion of text which are the objectives of language at both the communicative and the intellectual levels.

To build this discussion on scientific basis, I thought it would be much better if a considerable sample of the written production of these intermediate - high and advanced learners of AFL could be analyzed. From this errors analysis, the types of syntactic errors and their frequency that can be indicated may provide a ground for developing the previous hypothesis.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

N. Hedayet

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

FL018997

A sample of one hundred written works were gathered from different intermediate-high and advanced courses, where I was the teacher. In these courses, the students had to either summarize, criticize or freely compose. The sample represents a real phenomenon and its size is enough for the needed analysis.

The method used in this analysis, besides syntactic and morphologycal checking is sentence - combining. Each written production had the same chance of being examined in terms of grammatical rules and "maturity", i.e., the range of sentence types found.

The students' highly organized and intellectual ideas are written in functional hierarchy. The level of the target sample corresponds to the last three levels of the ACTFL proficiency guide lines for Arabic 1988.

The formula used to get the percentage of errors is

$$\frac{R}{W} \times 10 \quad \underline{OR} \quad \frac{\text{Total errors}}{\text{Total No. of words.}} \times 100$$

Table of Errors & Frequency

Type of Error	Frequency	Percentage of Errors
Article of definiteness	274	3.15%
Subordinate Clauses	243	3.68%
Two-word vocabulary (use of preposition)	235	2.9 %
Active participle	194	3.08%
Tense & agreement	171	2 %
Word - order	148	1.8%

From the above table, it becomes clear that the ordinary errors of learners of AFL, i.e, tense, agreement or word-order are not major errors that affect communication in the written production of the intermediate-high and advanced learners. There exists four other types that have this influence.

The existence of such types of errors, in spite of the rhetorical and functional hierarchial nature of their writings, reflect syntactical difficulties of Arabic for these levels of learners. These errors are so much related to the language use of Arabic and certainly affect communication at the above levels.

In Arabic there are six indications of definiteness; the article "al" is one of them. Because English is the first language of the sample examined, the linguistic comparison of the concept of definiteness and indefiniteness will be between them in Arabic & English. The syntactic difficulty here seems to be the influence of L1 on L2; for there seems to be some areas of overlapping & of difference in the two languages concerning this concept of definiteness.

Certainly, there are areas of similarities of this concept in Arabic & English. The article "al", as well as "the", is a function word indicating that a noun is specified or particularized, as opposed to the indefinite or generalized noun where no article is used in Arabic & where "a" or "an" are used in English.

In Arabic, the usage is confined in this areas to a noun that is previcusly mentioned in the context or understood between the interlocutors. Both languages are similar here.

Ex. The book you gave me... "al-kitab alladhi aʿtaytani"...

Where the English definite article is used to indicate that a noun is used generically, "al" in Arabic is used to refer to the same thing.

Ex. The dog is a quadruped. "al-kalbu ḥayawanun dhu arbaʿ"

The two definite articles are also used to indicate that a noun is present.

Ex. Give me the pen. "aʿṭini al-qalam"

.n these areas of similarities of the two languages there were almost no errors in the sample examined.

In other areas of definiteness (and indefiniteness) there seems to be a considerable overlapping and difference in the language use of the two languages.

With proper names of places and persons the English language uses either zero-indication or the indefinite or the definite article. Examples will show how different the concept is in the two languages.

Ex. - He returned to London.	"ʿāda ila London"
- not indeed a London he could remember (out of various ensemble impressions).	"lam yatadhkkar shayyan, ʿan London"
- and certainly not the London of his youth (that particular impression he had gained then).	"laysat London allati ʿarafaha fi shabābihi" Or "lam takun London shababihi".

Likewise, the use of Mr. Smith, a Mr. Smith & the Mr. Smith (whom we saw last week) etc.

In Arabic, definiteness of proper names of places and persons needs no article. For the English area of definiteness above, Arabic uses either the relative clause (alladhi or allati above) or the noun phrase form (idāfa construction).

What creates another area of confusion is the use of "al" in Arabic before a few proper names of places such as al-Qāhira (Cairo), al-Khartoum (Khartoum), al-Iraq (Iraq), where in English the definite article is not used, while it uses it before some others such as "The Netherlands", "The-Sudan". So both languages do not necessarily use the definite article before the same names, which sometimes creates misinterpretation and affects communication. An example from the sample may indicate how such syntactic difficulty affects the language use.

	L 1 Sentence	L 2 Sentence
Ex.	Al-Idrisi mentioned the efforts that Sultan Aḥmad had made to fortiry the city and Arab Algeria.	"dhakara al-Idrisi johūd as-Sulṭān Aḥmad li taḥṣēn al-madenati wa jaza'ir ɛarabiyya.

What the student wrote in Arabic without using "al" means: "Al-Idrisi mentioned the efforts Sultan Ahmad had made to fortify the city and (some) Arab ıslands". He should write the article: "al" jaza'ir al-ɛarabiyya to communicate the meaning he wanted.

If a noun is definite in Arabic (that is when it is a proper name or has an attached pronoun suffix), the adjective following it must have "al". This is not so in English since "the" of the adjective extends definiteness to the noun.

Ex.	Their powerful armies in the front line...	"juyushuhum qawiyyatun fi-l-jabhati....

What the student wrote in Arabic meant "their armies are powerful "where he should write " juyushuhum al-qawiyya".

English uses the article to mark a proper noun, natural phenomenon, ship, building etc. that is well known. Here also an example will be useful.

Ex.	The Queen Elizabeth	"al-malika Elizabeth"

The Arabic phrase means "Queen Elizabeth", where he should write "al-bākhira (ship) Elizabeth".

Where the definite article is not used before abstracts in English, "al" is used before any abstract in Arabic.

Ex.	Truth is stranger than fiction.	"ḥaqeqtān aghrab min khayāl.

The Arabic meaning here maybe "indeed it is stranger than (any) fiction", where the student should write "al-haqeqa aghrab min al-khayāl".

"al" is used before actions or states, and "the" is not.

Ex. in studying here "fi dirasatin huna"

This may mean "in a study (point) here", where the student should write the definite article: "fi ad-dirasati huna".

From the above discussion, it becomes clear that the concept of definiteness by the use of the article is an area of syntactic complexity which an advanced learner of AFL confronts; and this difficulty is created by cultural differences.

These areas of difference are not really "major" language differences, but are accidental properties which should be given some attention on the part of the teachers.

The second frequency of erros in the sample studied was that of the subordinate clause. By using O'Hare's concept of "maturity", or the range of the sentence types found in the written production of the sample, syntactic maturity is viewed in quantifiable terms. Compared with word - order or tense and agreement frequency, subordinate clause errors reflect an undeveloped control over long sentences containing, one main clause with other subordinate clause or clauses. According to Hunt (1965), T-unit or "minimal terminable", i.e., one main clause plus any subordinate ones, reflects developed maturity in writing.

Very few of the examined writings contained more than one correct subordinate clause. Adjectival and relative clauses were the easiest types used by the students because of their transformational nature. According to Hunt, at least 40% of their writing should include T-units. Less than 25% was T-units in our sample.

One of the main problems here, is the pronoun of fact (ḍamēr ashsh'an). Instead of using a pronoun of fact may students used long sentences that loosened the meaning.

	L 1 Sentence	L 2 Sentence
Ex.	This day is lovely.	"huwa yawmun jamilun"....

This means "it is a lovely day", where there is no stress conveyed, and where it should be "innahu yawmun jamilun".

	L 1 Sentence	L 2 Sentence
Ex.	Bob realized that there were many musicians who were more famous than he was.	adraka bob an kana honāk moseqiyyuna katheruna ashhara minhu.

If the student wrote "adraka bob annahu !!! the sentence would give the precise meaning using the correct pronoun of fact and hence a more developed subordinate clause in Arabic.

These learners ought to write longer clauses which, combined with the greater number of clauses, account for their writing longer T-units.

To develop this type of syntactic maturity of the learners of AFL, some kind of sentence - combining practice presented through Kernels, for example, may help in forming a habit or a skill of cognitive maturity at these levels.

The third noticeable type of error in the sample is in the area of prepositions, where the preposition and another word form one unit of meaning. It is true that the area of vocabulary (1) in general is a major area of error due to cultural differences and L 1 interference; but my concern here is the syntactic difficulty that may have an effect on vocabulary. The errors counted here are those where the preposition affected the meaning, or where a two-word vocabulary was used in the wrong meaning.

---

(1) Vocabulary errors, in general, constituted the highest frequency on top of all syntactic error frequencies.

Ex. They desire to see him. "raghibuna ɛan ru'yatihi"

What the student wrote meant, with the use of preposition "ɛan", "they do not want (desire) to see him". He should have used a different preposition to get the right meaning: "raghibuna fi ru'yatihi". Likewise is this example.

	L 1 Sentence	L 2 Sentence
Ex.	Although those who criticize Thomas Wolf are right, to some extent, I find his novels interesting.	"wa maɛa anna ha'ola'i alladhena yanaqoduna Tomas Wolf ɛalayhim haqq, ila ḥaddin ma, fa ana ajidu rowayatihi mothera.

The underlined preposition used here means " They have no right, or ought to where the student should have used preposition "maɛa".

A deeper syntactical knowledge should be offered to the advanced students of AFL, since they can be considered as the native writers of the language. The function of each preposition and the shades of meaning in the context must be given some more consideration.

The active-participle (ism al-fāɛil) in the errors analysis proved to have a considerable influence on the language use of Arabic. It covers a very wide area of tenses that are used in the English language. If it is used with verbs of the senses (see, smell, hear etc.), it expresses the present tense in English. If a future expression is used, "ism al-fāɛil" expresses the future in English. If it is used with other verbs than those of senses, "ism al-fāɛil" corresponds to the English progressive present and the present perfect tenses. When used as a predicate in the sentence it becomes an adjective. An example from the sample may be helpful here.

	L 1 Sentence	L 2 Sentence
Ex.	Are you leaving ?	" hall tusāfir ? (present tense)

The Arabic which the student wrote means "Do you leave (often)?", where he should write using the active participle "hall anta musāfiron?".

Ex. It is you who have killed me? " anta alladhi qataltani "

The student wrote in Arabic what means "you killed me", where he should use the active participle for a more expressive and rhetorical statement: "innaka qātili".

CONCLUSION

By teaching an integral grammar course to composition to the intermediate and advanced learners of AFL, many problems of syntax can be overcome. The ability of interpreting, not only of composing, in the sense of writing sentences corresponding to their correct signification in Arabic must be one of the objectives of this course.

In spite of what Widdowson states that acquisition of linguistic skills does not seem to guarantee the consequent acquisition of communicative abilities in a language", at this level of the ability of writing, linguistic skills facilitate the process. Written discourse is pretty much affected by advanced linguistic skills.

By using the kernal sentences in Arabic, information in writing is chunked increasingly into larger units of "discourse blocs" that are conceptual as well as structual. In this course, not like the one given on "connectors" now at the ALI (1), some sort of contrastive analysis of functional discourse patterns between Arabic and English should be considered. A foreign learner of Arabic, at the levels studied here, needs a strong syntactical base upon which his writing maturity is exercised.

To use Eskey's concept of reading by structure, an advanced student of AFL should produce written language by structure. In the suggested advanced grammar course that is integral to composition, advanced syntactic practices facilitate the previously acquired skills, add a new dimension to the cognitive "chunking" ability of the student. One can not learn to compose by mere writing or only by correct grammatical usage, or by merely manipulating and imitating longer rhetorical models, but as Prof. Zamel said, by the new approaches to grammar study the ability of student's writing will be certainly affected. The teaching of advanced integral syntax to advanced students of AFL will build confidence and hence a better ability of discourse.

Of course, not all learners of AFL have the same problems, but the problem of advanced syntactic difficulties prove considerably stable and predictable if not dealt with at that level successfuly.

---

(1) Arabic Language Institute at The American University in Cairo.

LIST OF BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. Abboud, P., Bezirgan N., Erwin W., MacCarus E., Rammony, R., Elementary Standard Spoken Arabic" Dept. of Near Eastern Studies, University of Michigan, 1975.

2. Al-Masry, A. Ibn Hisham, "Sharh Shudhur adhdhhab". Cairo, d. 761 H.

3. Al-Zubaydy, M. "Tāj alɛarūss" al-maktaba al-khayriyya, first ed. Cairo, 1306 H.

4. Bumfit & Johnson ed. "Communicative Approach to Language Teaching",. Oxford University Press, 1979.

5. Corder, P., " The Significance of Learners Errors", "Errors Analysis", ed. by Jack C. Richard. Longman, 1974.

6. Eskey, David, A New Technique for the Teaching of Reading to Advanced Students". "TESOL Quarterly". March, 1970.

7. Foley, W.A. & Van Valin, R. "Functional Syntax and Universal Grammar" "Cambridge Studies in Linguistics", Cambridge University Press.

8. Harb, N. "Tense & Time Referent of the Active Participle in Modern Standard Arabic". A thesis submitted to the CAS at the American University in Cairo, 1983.

9. Kirppendroff, Klaus, "Content Analysis. An Introduction to Its Methodology". Sage Pubis, Beverly Hills, London, 1980. Vol. 5.

10. Kramsky, Jiri, "The Article and the Concept of Definiteness in Language", The Hague, Paris. Mouton, 1972.

11. Lado, Robert,"Linguistics Across Culture", "Language Transfer in Language Learning, ed. Susan Gass & Larry Selinker. London, 1983.

12. Lane, E.W., "Arabic-English Lexicon". London, 1863. Williams & Norgate.

13. Nattinger, James R., "Second Dialect and Second Language in the Composition Class". "TESOL" , March, 1978, vol. 12, n. 1.

14. O'Hare, F., "Sentence Combining. "Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar". National Council of Teachers of English. Vrbana, Illinois, 1973.

15. Sako, S. "Writing Proficiency & Achievement Tests". "TESOL Quarterly". 1969, vol. 3, no. 3.

16. Stevick, E.W., "Memory; Meaning and Method". Mass., 1976.

17. "The Random House Dictionary of the English Language". The Unabridged Ed.

18. The ACTFL Proficiency Guidlines 1988.

Appendix 16

END

U.S. Dept. of Education

Office of Education
Research and
Improvement (OERI)

ERIC

Date Filmed

March 29, 1991